

Written testimony of the Family Violence Victim Advocate, (FVVA)
Women's Center of Greater Danbury, Inc. (GA3)
Kathryn Jones, J.D., FVVA
Raised Bill No. 6702 An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Submitted to Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee April 15, 2013

My testimony specifically addresses section 17 of the Bill which requires courts provide dedicated space to domestic violence victims and their advocates.

As a Family Violence Victim Advocate I work to protect the rights of domestic violence and sex assault victims in Danbury Superior court. At any given time we have approximately 400 open cases. Our clients are often in crisis, in hiding and in fear of their abusers. They seek our assistance in gaining Protective and Restraining orders, resources for themselves and their families, understanding of their rights, and the ability to have input into their cases. However, we have no space at court in which to provide these services: no office, no desk, no computer.

This has compromised our ability to ensure victims' safety.

Victims in crisis, sometimes only hours after they have been assaulted, wander the courthouse in attempts to locate an advocate. In one case, a victim with fresh injuries to her face was sent from office to office looking for an advocate, before she gave up in frustration. And when we do connect with clients in person, we often are forced to counsel them in hallways, stairwells and waiting areas where there is no confidentiality and where their batterer can harass them. And, even though we work with some of the most dangerous cases at court, we counsel our clients in an unsecure area with no panic button. It should be noted that all judicial offices have access to a panic button. On many occasions, inside the courthouse, we and our clients have been harassed, followed, threatened, and intimidated. It is difficult to say the court will do everything to protect a victim's safety, when a victim cannot feel safe inside a courthouse.

One of the most important safety planning tools for any victim is access to accurate information: information about the defendant's bond, incarceration status, the protective order, the charges, and whether the defendant is receiving treatment through a program. As FVVAs it is our duty to provide this information so victims can safety plan. But without access to a computer, a fax, or reliable landline phone we are hindered from doing the job we are obligated by statute to do. We cannot access the Protective Order registry, the Department of Corrections or Judicial websites, the SAVIN victim notification program, or any of the many on-line resources needed for victims and their families. This lack of support for the FVVA program sends the message to Domestic Violence victims that their cases are not prioritized by Judicial. But the reality is that there IS space at court. At Danbury Superior several offices sit empty either because they are used for storage or held for retired judges. That's why section 17 of RB 6702 is so important. It will ensure courts allocate a safe place for Domestic Violence Victims and provide their advocates the resources they need to ensure their safety.

Because of these arguments, I strongly support of RB 6702. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Kathryn Jones, J.D.,
Family Violence Victim Advocate
Women's Center of Greater Danbury
2 West Street, Danbury CT 06810
203.731.0166